

Gaelic Games Football

Earley says hand-passing a cause for concern



Seán Moran

Ex-FRC member feels GAA may have to act to protect the game's integrity

The GAA need to conduct an annual review of trends in football according to Paul Earley, who has said he is worried by the proliferation of hand-passing in the game.

Earley, a member of the Football Review Committee which reported two years ago and manager of Ireland's International Rules team in the past two series, is one of the GAA's most qualified football coaches and he believes the game runs the danger of becoming no longer attractive to watch.

"One of the things we said in the report was we wanted the GAA to look at the hand-pass on an annual basis and see if the trend changed," he told this newspaper. "It's up to them at this stage."

"It's easy enough, as we have all the data prior to 2013 so all they have to do is look at 2013 and 2014 championships and league campaigns and see if there are dramatic changes."

"We have too much debate in the GAA without supporting evidence in my view and we need to gather that evidence in order to have an informed discussion."

Report publication

The FRC report found that the ratio of hand-passing to kick-passing had steadily increased from 1.1:1 in the 1970s to 2.3:1 at the beginning of this decade. That ratio had however dropped in the couple of years to the report publication in late 2012 to 2.1:1.

At last month's GAA Congress, the proposer of one of the motions to restrict hand-passing (all defeated) cited statistics from one weekend's televised

matches earlier in this year's football league. It was a snap shot rather than a detailed survey sample but it showed in the Mayo-Tyrone and Meath-Kildare matches that the ratio was 3.9:1.

According to Earley the FRC decided not to recommend restriction of the hand-pass, as they believed that the trend was moving in the right direction but he believes that may be changing.

"When we considered this in the FRC, we thought the climate was changing but that the GAA needed to look at it on an annual basis and if that trend was being reversed to do something about it."

"I don't have data but anecdotally you'd imagine there was more hand-passing in the last year and they need to analyse that and if that is the case, do something about it - okay, it puts extra pressure on the referee

3.9:1

The ratio of hand-passes to kick-passes in a couple of recent televised matches

but it was done in the International Rules.

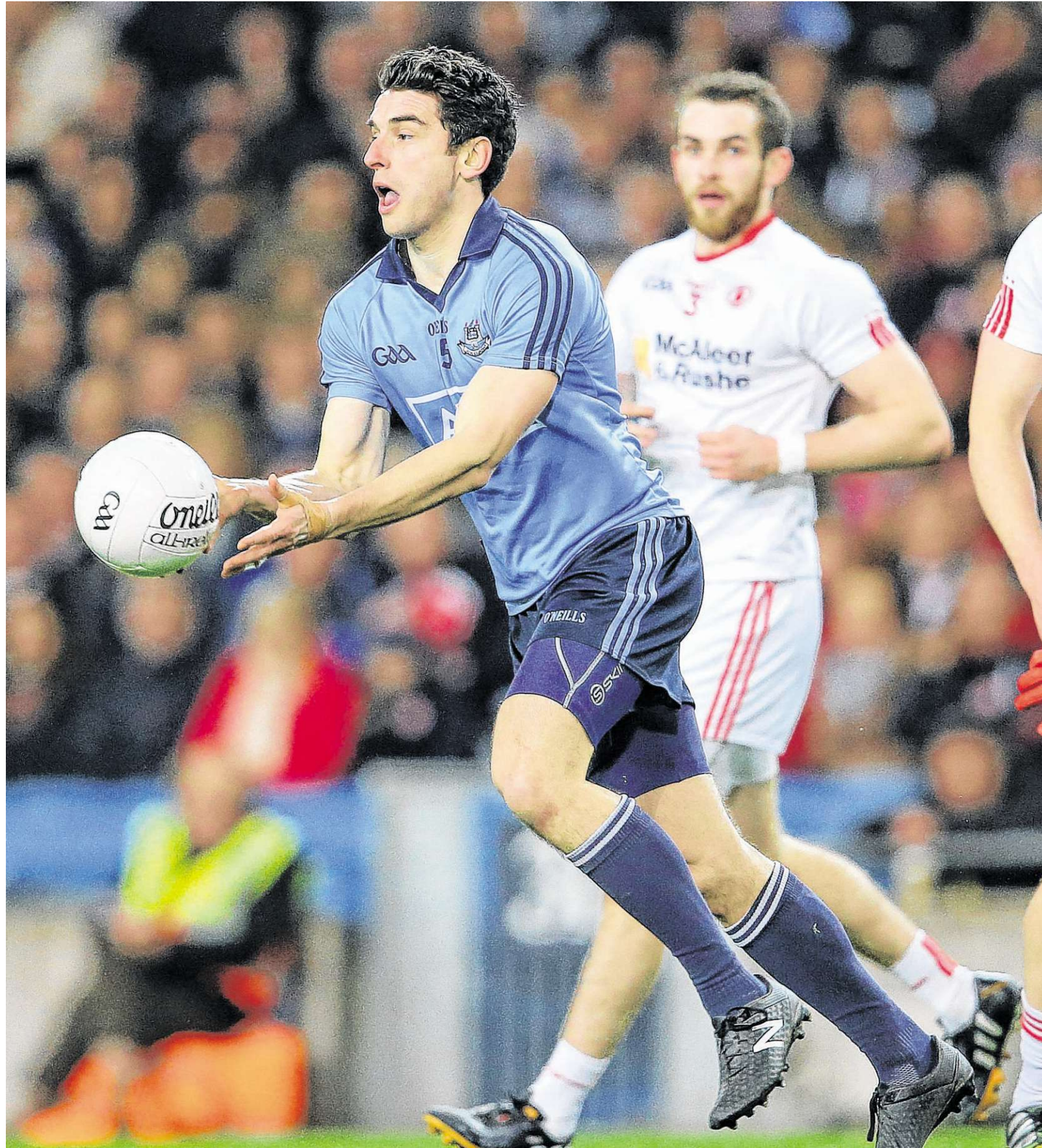
"I know there are two referees there but football is a slower game so I don't think it's the case that it's not manageable."

Whereas a year ago the influence of Dublin's attacking style was seen as strong after the county's All-Ireland win, the influence last year was different.

Defensive game

"If you look back this debate has probably been prompted by last year's All-Ireland final," he said, "which was quite a defensive game. Kerry certainly played more defensively than they had done throughout the championship. We had three great semi-finals which were very positive and where there was a lot of very good kicking."

"I think if we'd had a final like that this debate mightn't have been heard at all. When we looked at it we analysed 20 years ago, 10 years ago and the most recent trends. We found that the top teams in particular were kicking the ball as much



as they were hand-passing it and that the ratio had improved in the previous year or 18 months. We thought that may have been a trend but it is much easier to coach a defensive strategy than a creative attacking strategy.

"It worries me, the proliferation of hand-passing and how it's becoming more difficult to dispossess players in possession by the nature of the way the game is being played."

"Many teams are just allowing opposition to retain possession out the field and the put-

ting them under pressure in the forward line."

Earley doesn't believe that teams or coaches should have unfettered control over how the game is played, as it is the GAA's responsibility to protect what he terms "the core principles of football".

Core values

"We were trying to protect the core values or principles of the game. One of them was the contest and the high catching in the middle of the field. A lot of the excessive hand-passing arises

from the short kick-out and we saw it over the weekend. Whenever any team goes short you're going to have seven or eight hand passes up to the middle of the field in general; I know Dublin try to move it that bit quicker.

"The mark was defeated by a narrow margin in congress but it's interesting that International Rules kick-out that had to pass the 45-metre line last year got a lot of positive reaction and (GAA Director General) Páirc Duffy mentioned it in his annual report.

"It challenged us as coaching unit to try and master it. It promotes the contest in the middle of the field, which is what people want - and one of the reasons hurling is such a popular spectacle - to see and is one of the core principles. It would also substantially reduce the amount of hand-passing. Having seen it in action, I think it's something worth considering."

"The big issue here is that the administrators have got to protect the integrity of the game and the core principles. If they see it going in a particular direc-

tion and those principles are being diminished they've got to do something about. Football is a kicking game, a contesting game, a fast game but is moving away from that to being a possession game with very few contests around the field and less attractive for players to play and people to watch."

■ **Dublin's Bernard Brogan in action against Tyrone. Hand-passing is becoming an ever-increasing facet of the modern game.** PHOTOGRAPH: CATHAL NOONAN INPHO

News

Clare's Galvin may be bound for USA

EAMON DONOGHUE

Davy Fitzgerald has a battle on his hands going into this weekend's must-win Allianz Hurling League encounter against Dublin.

And he faces another battle to keep classy midfielder Colm Galvin on this side of the Atlantic for the remainder of the season.

Clare have lost all three of their league games to date and entertain Dublin this weekend in desperate need of a first win to help maintain their Division 1A status.

Looking ahead to the summer's championship though, Fitzgerald's attentions now centre upon persuading midfielder Galvin not to travel on a J1 visa to the US.

It's believed Galvin, 22, is intent on travelling for the upcoming summer months having been busy for the past number of years with the county's U-21 team.

Since joining the senior panel in 2012 the Clonara club man has won two All-Ireland Under-21 titles and he has often been resigned to 12-month-long seasons due to club and university commitments.

Four points

The 2013 All Star has started in all three of Clare's league games this campaign, scoring four points from play.

Meanwhile Clare's preparations for Dublin's visit to Ennis tomorrow have been interrupted by a disciplinary issue within their camp that has led to two members of the panel making way.

It's believed a handful of the current squad were involved in a disciplinary breach, with Nicky O'Connell and Davy O'Halloran being the two to subsequently depart the panel.

Clonara club man O'Connell has been in the senior panel since making his debut in 2010, winning an All-Ireland two years ago and scoring two points in last year's Munster championship against Cork.

O'Halloran scored 1-4 in the U-21 All-Ireland final two years ago and had started in both of Clare's pre-season Waterford Crystal Cup games this year, yet hadn't featured whatsoever in the league.

Furthermore Peter Dugan may miss the remainder of the league campaign as he continues his recovery from a hip operation. He has yet to feature this year for the Banner County.

Gaelic Games News

Mayo management ring the changes for first home stand of season

Fianna Fáil leader's son set to make his intercounty debut for Cork footballers

SEÁN MORAN

Division One leaders Mayo take on Dublin tomorrow evening in Castlebar in their first home match under lights this season. The team management shuffles the deck from the win against Derry, bringing in five players including goalkeeper Robbie Hen-

nolly, who takes over again from Kenneth O'Malley.

All Star Cillian O'Connor is injured and is replaced by Alan Freeman. Otherwise Patrick Durcan, Donal Vaughan - back from injury and Diarmuid O'Connor all come in for Ger Cafferkey, Danny Kirby and Micheál Forde respectively.

All-Ireland champions Kerry reprise last year's final against Donegal in Tralee on Sunday. Manager Eamonn Fitzmaurice makes three changes to the team walloped by Cork.

All Star Peter Crowley and Killian Young are brought into the half-back line with Paul Murphy, another All Star, switched to corner back and last year's captain Fionn Fitzgerald and Jack Sherwood dropping to the bench. Up front Paul Geaney returns from injury and replaces his cousin Michael Geaney, who has a back strain.

Cork make just one change for their trip to Omagh to take on Tyrone. Goalkeeper Ken O'Halloran is rested and Micheál Martin, son of the Fianna Fáil leader and UCC Sigerson goalkeeper, takes over for what is his league debut.

Three changes

Tyrone manager Mickey Harte makes three changes to the team that was unlucky not to beat Dublin at Croke Park last weekend. All of these are forced with corner back Cathal McCarron unable to play because of a

hamstring injury. His place for Sunday's match against Cork in Omagh goes to Dwayne Quinn.



■ **Stephen McDonnell replaces the injured Christopher Joyce**

McShane has been released to the under-21s and his place at left corner forward goes to Connor McAliskey.

After their record points total of 34 against Dublin in last week's league encounter in Croke Park Cork hurlers rotate a few players for Sunday's trip to Galway in Division One A of the Allianz Hurling League.

Full back Christopher Joyce is out for the season with a damaged cruciate ligament and his place goes to Stephen McDonnell. On the bench this weekend will be both Luke O'Farrell and

Rob O'Shea, who each shot four points from play. Their places go to Brian Lawton and Paudie O'Sullivan, at wing forward and full forward respectively.

At corner back William Kearney comes in for Conor O'Sullivan and the other change sees Stephen Moylan replace Alan Cadogan at corner forward.

CORK (AFL v Tyrone): M Martin; K O'Halloran; J Loughrey, M Shields, Tom Clancy, Tomás Clancy, S O'Donoghue, J O'Sullivan; E Cadogan, F Goolish, K O'Driscoll, J O'Rourke, C O'Driscoll, C O'Neill, M Collins; B Hurley.

MAYO (AFL v Dublin): R Hennelly, T Cunniffe, K Keane, K Higgins, L Keegan, C Boyle, P Durcan; S O'Shea, D Vaughan; K McLoughlin, A O'Shea, D O'Connor; M Ronaldson, A Freeman, J Doherty.

TYRONE (AFL v Cork): N Morgan; A McCrory, R McNamee, D Quinn; R McNabb, Justin McMahon, P Harte; C Cavanagh, P McNulty; T McCann, M Donnelly, R McKenna; D McCurry, S Cavanagh (capt); C McAliskey.

DERRY (AFL v Monaghan): T Mallon; O Duffy, N Holly, D McBride; B McAlary, K Johnson, SL McGoldrick, M Craig, B McGilgan; B Heron, M Lynch, E Lynn; D McKinniss, E McGuickin, C McWilliams.

CORK (AHL v Galway): A Nash (capt); S O'Neill, S McDonnell, W Kearney, L McLoughlin, M Ellis, C Murphy, D Kearney, Aidan Walsh; CLehane, S Harnes, BL Mahony, P Horgan, PHorgan.

LIMERICK (AHL v Offaly): N Quaid, S Walsh, R McCarthy, S Hickey, C Allis, D Hannan, D Morrissey, J Ryan, P Browne; D Breen, D O'Grady, CLynch, J Fitzgibbon, S Dowling, S Tobin.

Briefs

Men's Hockey

San Diego form augurs well for crack at Olympics qualification

The men's national squad can look towards a short rest before the final qualification tournament in Argentina presents an opportunity to compete in the Olympics.

That Ireland won the World League event in San Diego augurs well for another crack at qualification after the disappointment of 2012.

Ireland will be part of a ten-team tournament with potentially six places available for Rio 2016 on the line.

Ireland can also take confidence for both scoring the most goals (29 from six games) and not conceding a field goal in California.

The full card for Argentina has not yet been set with three from San Diego,

Ireland, Austria and Canada travelling as well as three teams from a tournament played in January in Singapore. Hosts Singapore beat Poland in the final of that event with Japan beating Oman to the third place.

A third tournament is coming to a conclusion this weekend in Cape Town, where France and South Africa have topped their pools and look likely along with one other nation to be joining the other six teams for the June tournament.

Domestically Corinthians face Glenanne in the Leinster Senior Cup final in Grange Road on St Patrick's Day. The match takes place after the women's midday final.

Formula One

Governing body FIA looking into Alonso crash

Formula One governing body FIA are seeking further information from the McLaren team about driver Fernando Alonso's heavy crash during testing last month that led to the Spaniard suffering temporary memory loss.

The two-time world champion will miss Sunday's Australian Grand Prix on doctor's orders after spending three nights in hospital following the crash in Barcelona.

"We are working with McLaren and our medical department is still looking at all the information we can find," FIA race director Charlie Whiting told reporters.

Cricket

De Villiers leads South Africa to comfortable win over UAE

South Africa skipper AB de Villiers's accomplished showing with bat and ball helped the Proteas to a 146-run World Cup victory over the United Arab Emirates in Wellington.

De Villiers underpinned South Africa's innings with a sparkling 82-ball 99 as they reached 341 for six, before taking two for 15 from three overs as the UAE were bowled out for 195 in response with 15 balls remaining.

De Villiers surprisingly fell one run short of his century, but will take consolation from having smashed four sixes to take his total to 20 at this showpiece - the most at the tournament - and a



■ AB de Villiers: fell just one short of his century

record 36 in 21 World Cup matches overall.

The victory was as comfortable as the margin suggests for South Africa as the UAE slumped to a fifth defeat in as many World Cup games. De Villiers shared a successful 108-run fourth-wicket stand with David Miller.

Equestrian

UAE Federation suspended over horse welfare

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been suspended by the International Equestrian Federation (FEI) indefinitely over horse welfare and rule infringements in endurance events.

Under the ban UAE riders will not be allowed to compete for their country in international events, although they will be allowed to compete under an FEI flag in non-endurance disciplines outside of the Emirates.

Endurance races in the Middle East can be brutal with distances of 100 miles a day, covered at high speed, common.

Results round-up

Cricket

ICC WORLD CUP - Pool B (Wellington) South Africa 341-8 Innings Complete (AB de Villiers 82, F Behardien 64 no) v United Arab Emirates 195 (S Patil 57 no) South Africa beat United Arab Emirates by 146 runs.

Cycling

TIRRENO-ADRIATICO - Italy (World Tour) Stage 1 (Camaione to Cascina): 1, Jens Debusschere (Lotto Soudal) 153 kilometres in 3 hours 30 mins 18 secs; 2, P Sagan (Tinkoff-Saxo); 3, S Bennett (Bora-Argon 18); 4, A Porsev (Team Katusha); 5, T Farrar (MTN - Qhubeka); 6, M Cort Nielsen (Orica GreenEdge). **General classification:** 1, Adriano Maloni (Movistar Team) 3 hours 36 mins 22 secs; 2, P Sagan (Tinkoff-Saxo) same time; 3, F Cancellara (Trek Factory Racing) at 1 sec; 4, G Van Avermaet (BMC Racing Team) at 2 secs; 5, M Brandt (IAM Cycling); 6, B Bodnar (Tinkoff-Saxo) both same time. **Irish:** 48, S Bennett (Bora-Argon 18) at 16 secs; 114, D Martin (Cannondale-Garmin Pro Cycling Team) at 30 secs.

Rowing

COLOURS RACES (O'Connell Bridge to St James's Gate, Saturday, March 14th) **SQUADS - Senior Women** (Corcoran Cup) 5.00: Trinity, J Crowe, H O'Neill, H McCarthy, S Healy, S O'Brien, A Leahy, J McHugh, R Morris; Cox: N Williams. **UCD** (Cannonade-Garmin Pro Cycling Team) at 30 secs.

Snooker

INDIAN OPEN (Mumbai) - Second round: Kieren Wilson (Eng) bt Ben Woollaston (Eng) 4-1; Robert Milkins (Eng) bt Joe Swail (Nir) 4-1; Li Hang (Chn) bt Stuart Carrington (Eng) 4-1; Jamie Jones (Wll) bt Gerard Greene (Nir) 4-3; Graeme Dott (Sco) bt David Morris (Irl) 4-0; Joe Perry (Eng) bt Rod Lawler (Eng) 4-1; Tian Pengfei (Chn) bt Mark Joyce (Eng) 4-1.

What's on Today

RACING: Dundalk 6.05; Cheltenham 1.30; Lingfield 1.55; Wolverhampton 5.45. **RUGBY:** U20s Six Nations - Wales v Ireland, Parc Eiras, 7.45; BSI Cup semi-final - Worcester Warriors v Leinster A. **SOCCER:** National League Premier (7.45) Division - Bohemians v Galway United, Dalymount Park; Cork City v Limerick, Turner's Cross; Derry City v Dundalk, Brandywell Stadium; Drogheda United v Sligo Rovers, United Park; St Patrick's Athletic v Bray Wanderers, Richmond Park; First Division - Athlone Town v Cobh Ramblers, Athlone Town; 7.45; UCD v Shelbourne, UCD Bowl; 7.45; Finn Harps v Cabinteely, Finn Harps; 7.45; Drogheda v Waterford United, Ferrycarrig Park; 8.0